

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (currently amended) A clearance damping element for use with a telescoping shaft assembly including a shaft having a shaft outer diameter and a tube configured to receive the shaft therein, the clearance damping element comprising:

a tube engaging portion having a body having first and second ends and adapted to fixedly receive the tube; and

a shaft engaging portion having a body extending from the second end of the tube engaging portion body, the shaft engaging portion body having a plurality of radially spaced axial slots therealong to define a plurality of flexible fingers, at least two of the fingers having inward extending projections such that the fingers define an inner diameter less than the shaft outer diameter when the fingers are in a relaxed, unbiased condition, the fingers and projections configured such that the fingers will apply a dampening force to the shaft but will not prevent relative axial movement between the shaft and tube.

2. (original) The clearance damping element of claim 1 wherein each finger includes an inward extending projection.

3. (original) The clearance damping element of claim 1 wherein the shaft engaging portion body has a given axial length and each axial slot has an axial length less than the given axial length.

4. (original) The clearance damping element of claim 3 wherein each axial slot has an axial length about three-quarters of the given axial length.

5. (original) The clearance damping element of claim 1 wherein the shaft engaging portion body has four axial slots.

6. (original) The clearance damping element of claim 1 wherein the shaft engaging portion and the tube engaging portion are each manufactured from a polymer.

7. (original) The clearance damping element of claim 1 wherein the shaft engaging portion body and the tube engaging portion body each have a cylindrical configuration.

8. (original) The clearance damping element of claim 1 wherein the shaft engaging portion body and the tube engaging portion body have coplanar inner and outer surfaces.

9. (original) The clearance damping device of claim 1 wherein the shaft engaging portion body has an inner diameter less than an inner diameter of the tube engaging portion body such that the shaft engaging portion body defines a shoulder at the second end of the tube engaging portion body.

10. (original) The clearance damping device of claim 1 wherein each projection has splines along an inner edge.

11. (currently amended) A telescoping shaft assembly including
a shaft having a shaft outer diameter;
a tube configured to receive the shaft therein, the tube having a tube outer diameter;
a clearance damping element comprising:
a tube engaging portion having a body having first and second ends and adapted to fixedly receive the tube; and
a shaft engaging portion having a body extending from the second end of the tube engaging portion body, the shaft engaging portion body having a plurality of radially spaced axial slots therealong to define a plurality of flexible fingers, at least two of the fingers having inward extending projections such that the fingers define an inner diameter less than the shaft outer diameter when the fingers are in a relaxed, unbiased condition, the fingers and projections

configured such that the fingers apply a dampening force to the shaft but do not prevent relative axial movement between the shaft and tube.

12. (original) The telescoping shaft assembly of claim 11 wherein each finger includes an inward extending projection.

13. (original) The telescoping shaft assembly of claim 11 wherein the shaft engaging portion body has a given axial length and each axial slot has an axial length less than the given axial length.

14. (original) The telescoping shaft assembly of claim 13 wherein each axial slot has an axial length about three-quarters of the given axial length.

15. (original) The telescoping shaft assembly of claim 11 wherein the shaft engaging portion body has four axial slots.

16. (original) The telescoping shaft assembly of claim 11 wherein the shaft engaging portion and the tube engaging portion are each manufactured from a polymer.

17. (original) The telescoping shaft assembly of claim 11 wherein the shaft engaging portion body and the tube engaging portion body each have a cylindrical configuration.

18. (original) The telescoping shaft assembly of claim 11 wherein the shaft engaging portion body and the tube engaging portion body have coplanar inner and outer surfaces.

19. (original) The telescoping shaft assembly of claim 11 wherein the shaft engaging portion body has an inner diameter less than an inner diameter of the tube engaging portion body such that the shaft engaging portion body defines a shoulder at the second end of the tube engaging portion body.

20. (original) The telescoping shaft assembly of claim 11 wherein each projection has splines along an inner edge.

21. The telescoping shaft assembly of claim 11 wherein the a tube engaging portion body has an inner diameter less than or equal to the tube outer diameter such that there is an interference fit therebetween.